

Great Schools for ALL

POST-SYMPOSIUM COMMUNICATION • JANUARY 2015

Dear GS4A supporter,

As promised in our December communication, we are asking for your help to develop specific actions that will guarantee access to a quality education for every child in greater Rochester – particularly those who now attend high-poverty city schools with a long history of unacceptable outcomes.

Many who attended our day-long symposium on Nov. 10, and others who could not, have offered support for the effort to improve educational outcomes using a variety of means to improve the socio-economic mix in all our schools.

What we know from decades of research and real world experience is that children in high-poverty schools (where 60 percent or more of the student population lives in poverty) are far less likely to graduate on time ready for college or work. Conversely, success rates improve dramatically when children attend socio-economically integrated schools with no adverse consequences to the students already functioning at or above grade level.

This issue is finally getting the attention it deserves. In his inaugural address earlier this month, Gov. Cuomo acknowledged that the concentration of poverty has transformed our educational system from a great equalizer to a great discriminator. Both the state Education Department and the Board of Regents are calling for action to increase socio-economic integration. Now is the time to act.

In November we asked participants to identify ways we might better integrate our schools and improve achievement levels, across district lines, while maintaining the current structure of city and suburban school districts in Monroe County.

Based on the responses collected that day, the GS4A coordinating committee has established five work groups. We're asking those interested to commit to serving on one of these five groups for 60 days and to producing a preliminary report of findings. Each report will then be presented during our community-wide conference this spring.

WORK GROUP SUMMARY

- **Countywide magnet schools.** This group will look at options for schools open to students from anywhere in the county, with a student population of no more than 40 percent low-income. Magnet schools, elementary and secondary, are organized around programs or educational themes intended to appeal to a wide range of families – e.g., science, language immersion, the arts, leadership, etc.
- **Socio-economically integrated summer learning programs.** There are many summer learning programs in Monroe County; this group would look at how to better integrate them and develop additional programs.
- **Urban-Suburban expansion.** The Urban-Suburban Interdistrict Transfer Program program opened in 1965 and now places more than 500 minority city students in schools in the seven participating suburban districts. This group should look at ways to expand the program to more districts, increase student participation, and consider ways to draw suburban students to city schools.
- **Regional planning to improve school integration.** This group can review regional planning efforts elsewhere to determine whether alternative methods of school taxation and cooperative efforts among school districts could be a part of integration efforts here.
- **Outreach and diversity.** This group will look at ways to carry the GS4A message to a wider community, to engage new groups in the conversation and broaden our base of support.

Each group is tasked with establishing straightforward objectives, reviewing relevant research, assessing opportunities for and barriers to success, and proposing action steps that could be initiated within the next year.

NEXT STEPS

If you are able to be a part of this 60-day effort, **please respond to greatschools4all@gmail.com by Friday, Jan. 16, 2015.**

- Identify the work group(s) you would like to join.
- Share with us your interest and any relevant experience you bring to this effort.
- Suggest others who might be interested in participating and/or who should be considered as a group convener.

In late January, once groups have been established and conveners identified, we will provide further information about initial meeting schedules. Thank you so much for your interest in this important work.

CONTACT GS4A

John Wilkinson and Lynette Sparks, conveners • (585)271-6513 • greatschools4all@gmail.com